



Photo: Anne Stuzin

*Baltimore Believe co-chair Wally Pinkard stands proud under a local campaign banner at the Roland Park Fire Station.*

## *Believe – A Word That Wields Power*

By Anne Stuzin

BELIEVE. It's a bumper sticker on a car you're behind on Roland Avenue. A banner above the doors of our firehouse. Something you may have heard on the radio. It's a word, simply stated in black and white. But there is a great deal more to these seven letters. Believe is a word that lately wields a lot of power in Baltimore.

Believe is Baltimore Believe, a campaign launched in April 2002 by Mayor Martin O'Malley. Created in response to the devastating realities of drugs in our city, Believe is an effort to battle the problem from all sides, like making the public more aware of how serious drugs are (not only in the inner city, but throughout our region), challenging drug users to get treatment, dealers to stop dealing, and teaching children to stay away from drugs. Ultimately, Believe sends the message that making progress on the drug problem means hope and progress for the people of Baltimore.

Initially a 15-week media campaign, Believe was showcased by a powerful, 4-minute documentary film that aired on our local TV stations. The message was further reinforced by TV and Radio advertising, newspaper messages and billboards through July. A toll-free phone number (1-866-BELIEVE) was established to encourage people to call and take action (i.e. to seek treatment, to report dealers, to mentor a child to keep him or her away from drugs, etc.). This number also appeared on brochures and in transit advertising. In addition, various public relations events and activities took place to spread the word about Believe. Over 75,000 BELIEVE bumper stickers appear on every bus, taxicab, police car and other city vehicles. No stone was left unturned in the effort to communicate the message of Believe to residents, especially those in Baltimore's inner city who live with the most serious realities and consequences of the drug problem every day.

The Believe campaign has been nothing short of a defining chapter for Baltimore and an unprecedented effort in the U.S. It's a bold and ambitious program, supported by a group of individuals who are absolutely convinced of its potential, and completely committed to its success. Mayor Martin O'Malley has called it a "historical effort to change the mindset of the city."

Perhaps nobody is more committed to Baltimore Believe than Roland Park resident Wally Pinkard. A tireless promoter of what's good in our city, Wally is the President and CEO of Colliers Pinkard, the chairman of the Baltimore Community Foundation and a leader of Baltimore Believe.

The *Roland Park News* sat down recently with Wally to learn more about the Believe campaign, his hopes for its future, and why it's so important to a community like Roland Park.

RPN: How did Believe Baltimore get started and how did you get involved in the campaign?

WP: The campaign idea started with Mayor O'Malley and was initially funded by the Baltimore Police Foundation. He asked me to get involved and help lead the team. I accepted, knowing this is one of the most important things this city will ever do.

RPN: So what are the realities we should we be believing in? What is our city up against?

WP: Believe that drugs are killing this city and our community and are a threat to our collective future. Believe that you can do something. Believe that's it's your obligation and your will to do something to help reverse the situation.

RPN: What were the initial goals of the campaign when it was launched last April?

WP: First, to recognize the significance of the problem – each of us needs to do this and so does the whole community. Second, to create a call to action to do something about the problem. Third, to create awareness that connects doing something with hope.

RPN: What are the stumbling blocks to Baltimore Believe's effectiveness as a campaign?

WP: It was and is, an enormously ambitious campaign, no question. We are up against a lot of pessimism and apathy. Many people think the easy way out is to say it's not their problem. But the fact is, there is no such thing as too much pressure when you see how many people are affected by the drug problem and how drugs ultimately undermine the progress of our city. As Mayor O'Malley said, "we need to take people out of their comfort zone."

RPN: Where has Baltimore Believe succeeded?

WP: I think we have started to make significant progress towards meeting the goals we established at the start of the campaign. Believe has created awareness and started to mobilize members of the community. Over 75% of Baltimore residents claimed in postmedia research to be aware

of the Believe advertising, with 60% able to recall the campaign messages. What's been so encouraging is that people said the messages were important to them, and that they were more likely to take some action in response to the campaign. Over 6,000 people called the toll-free Believe number between the end of April and the end of September, 2002, an indication of the campaign's effectiveness at motivating people with a call to action. Also, in this same time period, calls to Baltimore Substance Abuse Systems about treatment options were up over two and a half times the previous year's volume. A significant increase was also seen in calls to mentoring agencies, with inquiries about mentoring a child up over five times the level monitored before Believe began.

RPN: You and your team are approaching the end of Year 1 with Believe. So what's next?

WP: As a media campaign, Believe was designed to initiate and inspire action against the drug problem. As we move into the second year of the campaign, we're continuing to focus on the same basic objective, although Believe has evolved beyond a media campaign and has become a real movement. It's about feeling like we're all doing something, coming together as a community on the drug problem. The responsibility for achieving results now falls to organizations like the Baltimore Community Foundation, working with local government. We are excited about an effort that will be known as Reason to Believe, and we plan to launch new strategies shortly. We expect these initiatives will make a real statement about the seriousness of our commitment and that they will succeed at improving conditions for families and children most at risk in our city. Reason to Believe has in part been developed by applying strategies from Safe and Sound, a campaign at work in Baltimore and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that aims to make significant changes in how children's problems are addressed in a community.

Our goals are measurable- we know who the impacted families are we want to help and we have specific financial support in place to take action. We'll be able to chart our progress, family by family, child by child.

Reason to Believe will be going on as the Believe movement evolves. We are planning partnerships with our area schools (there is a curriculum being planned around the documentary film), fundraising and progress on increasing drug treatment options, to name a few. Ultimately, we'll measure our success based on creating opportunities and jobs for those who choose a path away from drugs or for those who decide to make themselves drug-free. In the end, it's economic development that's at the core – leading to a re-population of the city, our ultimate hope.

RPN: How does a community like Roland Park fit in to Baltimore Believe? What do you want to tell your neighbors about the movement?

WP: For this to be successful we need everyone, we need people in Roland Park to say eliminating the drug problem and improving Baltimore is

very important to us. We need people to understand and believe that there are solutions. If you believe Roland Park is your community, then I ask you to expand your idea of community to the whole of Baltimore. We all need to see that inner city problems are in fact our problems. Understand that what goes on “down there” goes on “up here” – we’re just more insulated. To get involved, you can do things like make a donation to Baltimore Believe, volunteer to be a mentor to a child, or organize a group to do something in the community. If you are a high schooler, challenge your school’s community service programs to help in the Believe cause. Remember, Believe is a campaign designed to inspire action. Once Reason to Believe gets underway, residents will have even more opportunities to get involved. For more information you can also access our website, [BaltimoreBelieve.com](http://BaltimoreBelieve.com).

RPN: Give us three important reasons to believe.

WP: I’d say the first is will. I think that if the people of Baltimore come together, through their churches, schools, community organizations, businesses, we can get at this problem successfully. There is a way if there is will. Second, diversity. This is a fabulous asset of our city, yet it’s not being recognized positively enough. We need to work on the disconnect between the haves and have nots. Finally, our inferiority complex. We are our own worst enemy at promoting ourselves in Baltimore. We don’t fully recognize our strengths as a city and consider that there is so much Baltimore has to offer.

BELIEVE. If you think about it, Roland Park residents have a long history of believing. There was a belief in the vision for the new kind of community that Roland Park ultimately became. And it took a lot of believing for people to come to Roland Park in the first place. And over so many years, our community has continued to believe in upholding the traditions that make Roland Park a unique and wonderful place to live. Our successful civic organizations are proof of our ability as a community to come together to make progress on issues affecting all of us. Now, we are being challenged to believe a little more, and Wally Pinkard wants us to know there is a lot of upside to our doing just that.